

## Women's Wheelchair Basketball

### Bridgette Reiner

#### **EVOKE**

##### **About the Ethnographer**

My name is Bridgette Reiner, and I am currently a senior majoring in Kinesiology with the intention to go to grad school for clinical exercise physiology. I work as a certified personal trainer at CRCE and have found it to be rewarding as it is very applicable to my future career working with older populations. I have always been an overachiever, and my biggest achievement yet will be obtaining a master's degree in a total of 4 years (3 undergraduate + 1 graduate). When I was a freshman, I played on the Varsity Women's Rugby team, and I was also a member of the Illini Tae Kwon Do club. I have since been injured so I was unable to maintain my participation in both organizations. However, I am passionate about sports and try to play recreationally as much as I can. I have not taken any courses prior to this that resemble it so the course perspective is somewhat new to me. There are several topics within the broad topic of "Illinois athletics" which could be of interest to me. At this point in time, I am taking a gymnastics class which has sparked genuine interest on my part. My investigation could explore the men's and women's gymnastics teams, or I may look in to rugby as it is one of my favorite sports. It would be interesting to look at gender differences within those sports.

#### **EXPLORE**

##### **Investigate**

Most of the readings expressed that history cannot ever be completely objective. There are various types of memory which all interact to create history. As John Nerone stated, there is personal memory of personal experiences, personal memory of things not experienced, social or public memory, and history. History as viewed today is created by people who have some sort of significance in the public eye, however, history is no longer created for the public. History has become something that is created by historians for other historians. History is essentially an ongoing battle between the opinions of historians because it is made so that the public cannot understand it. The public, then, is accused by historians for not having a sense of pride or interest for history when in actuality, it is the historians that do not. The historians have only pride for their ego; pride for their pretentious pieces of literary babble, and a lack of true historical method. Thus, what remains is something called group memory, according to Nerone. Society is split up into groups, and each group has its own history and perception of history. For example, some people think that the Holocaust never happened, while others suffer at the horror of such an event. Even when multiple groups' histories are put together in a dominant public memory and there is an expectation that they will coexist, there will always be differing viewpoints of history. Hence, history is more subjective than anything and is subject to constant revisions as interpretations of history differ. As Paul Connerton stated, history is affected by our present as well as our past. Therefore, history is constantly being reevaluated. Further, when historians aren't busying themselves with out-writing each other, they are looking to report history that agrees with the public. In a sense, everyone

is a historian. However, this, in turn, leaves a lot of actual history out. After having read the articles and giving it some thought, I determined that there is one specific time in my life where the concepts in these articles applied most. That time was when I played for the Illinois Women's Rugby team. Rugby is popularly viewed as a violent, masculine sport, even for women. The reason for this is that it is portrayed this way by the media. If you search online, you can see the masculine undertone of the sport as presented by the media. The article written by John Bale touches upon media representation. He explained how "the African" was presented two completely different ways by the media. In a sense, the media does not portray women's rugby in a positive light. Further, stereotypes about sexuality and women's rugby are perpetuated everywhere. As articles have stated, the public has a dominant memory, however, they also have dominant perceptions and stereotypes. This applies when talking about women's rugby. Also, I previously stated that different groups have their own histories, and I found a link for a women's rugby page that directly expresses this. On the page, when explaining the origin of rugby, it states, "There is also the worn-out legend of William Webb Ellis, who one day during a soccer match at Rugby School in England, decided to pick up the ball and run with it. Our own research has shown that the kid's name was really Wilma and it was her ball. She was merely trying to make a point on the rampant sexism and provincial attitudes of that particular institution; besides, her mom was calling" ([http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~radrugby/rookie\\_primer.html](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~radrugby/rookie_primer.html)). Though there is humor in this, there is the truth that different groups have different histories that they believe in and that motivate them.

The Sydnor and Osmond, Phillips, & O'Neill articles though separated by 6 years are very similar in content. Both articles address statuary roles in society. However, the Sydnor article branches out a bit to include other objects in liminal space which come to represent culture. Sydnor provided ample examples in society on the perceptions associated with one man who came to be a statue, an icon, celebrity. The article on Duke showed that he too became a statue, an icon, and a celebrity, however, in a different way that Michael Jordan did. The authors on Duke pointed out the fact that the statue of Duke is not really open to interpretation like the one of Jordan. Though there is a plaque on the Duke statue highlighting his achievements, the actual modeling of the statue points more to his surfing achievement over all others. The social memory of Duke transformed over time, much like the social memory of other statues and objects in liminal space. These articles (especially the Sydnor article) call attention to the fact that artifacts/objects/statues become "whatever." The articles achieved this by presenting similar content differently. Sydnor's article is more personalized than the Duke article. She used personal anecdotes, both oral and electronic (internet site excerpts) to present information. She also approached her interpretation of the Jordan monument with a "being-thus" theory. Osmond, Phillips, & O'Neill presented a more factual based compilation with a seemingly negative undertone as they expressed that social memory destroyed Duke's other significant accomplishments.

I thought the Rosenbaum article was one of the most entertaining articles we've read. I found it shocking that these types of pictures were actually taken years ago and that they were allowed to be taken. The human body is a fascinating thing, hence why it is studied, however I never thought body types would be studied under a false pretense. In our field

of kinesiology, study of the human body and its movement is central. Posture is an important part as well, though these “posture photos” were not really looking at it. Body typing is important in the field, especially for fitness/nutrition endeavors. It is also important to educate people about it so they know how to train or eat for fitness. The article also touched on the psychological problems with women and their bodies which is prevalent in studies today. Body image is largely studied in kinesiology.

### **Question**

I have contacted Mike Frogley about the Gizz kids and Tim Nugent, and he convinced me to go in a different direction. I think that I will try to do something about the women's wheelchair basketball team as there is much less written about women's sports in general in the past. There is not a lot of literature out about the Ms. Kids (women's wheelchair basketball team), and if I could find out who played on the team and find one woman to interview it would be great. I could focus my research around her experience playing for the Ms. Kids and what practice was like as well as what the public opinion about the Ms. Kids was like. I will look into the archives for any information on or pictures of the Ms. Kids.